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WHAT HIGHER CRITICISM IS NOT.

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WHEN a Protestant uses the term "Catholic" as if it were synonymous with Roman Catholic; when a Presbyterian or a Baptist or a Methodist speaks of "the Church" as if the term denoted especially the Episcopalian Church; when religious men talk of the respective claims of science and of theology as if science were exclusive of theology; in each case, the person so using language verbally gives away his own position, in favor of his opponent. He intends no concession. He merely means to save time by using a briefer expression. But, verbally, he concedes the whole point at issue; and practically the concession has a genuine and important influence over many minds.

The same is true when one uses the terms "higher criticism," "the higher critics," as a mere descriptive phrase, or a phrase of opprobrium, in speaking of the views in regard to the Bible which he himself disapproves. In doing this he concedes, verbally, that the doctrines he opposes are the genuine product of genuinely scientific processes, and are therefore probably true. He does not intend this concession, but he actually makes it; and as the age is fully convinced of the validity of scientific processes, his concession has more effect than all the arguments he can adduce on the opposite side. Supposing the new views of the Bible to be from Satan, Satan must be remarkably well pleased at having them met, not by study and argument, but by a spiteful sounding misuse of the terms that describe them.

Higher criticism as a process is, of course, the scientific search after the truth in regard to the literary structure and peculiarities and the authorship of writings. The men who advocate what some of us regard as destructive views concerning the Old Testament necessarily consider themselves as genuine higher critics, and the results they have reached as preëminently the higher criticism of the Old Testament. Their opponents cannot afford to admit the truth of this claim. They are higher critics, but

not the only higher critics. Their studies are attempts in higher criticism, but to admit that these attempts have been so successful as to deserve to be called the higher criticism is to admit that the results they have reached are true.

This is commonplace. No one disputes it. But there are plenty of public speakers and public prints that will give these definitions with perfect clearness, and then proceed to discuss the questions involved as if the definitions were not true, as if higher criticism were simply the criticism that attacks the received views concerning the Bible. This, then, is constantly the first statement to make as to what the higher criticism is not. It is not any one particular school of higher criticism. The term is a name applied to a department of science, or, from another point of view, to a scientific process, and not exclusively to any one set of investigations or conclusions in that department. This statement is trite as trite can be, but it needs to be repeated yet a thousand times, and insisted upon till men heed it.

In what more I have to say, I shall limit the subject. There is now prevalent a certain generic form of the higher criticism of the Old Testament, a form which exists with a good deal of specific variation, but with a general similarity of processes and results. Without taking the trouble to define it more particularly, let us note, in a few incomplete specifications, what this form of higher criticism is not.

First, it is not the final higher criticism of the Old Testament. Few of its advocates would claim that it is. Most of them recognize the fact that it is inchoate, transitional, incomplete. Many of its particular processes and results are yet tentative, some of its laws being yet unestablished, and many of its criteria uncertain. Personally, I should go very far in denying its validity, at many points. It is an attack on traditionalism, but it has retained as its own basis most of the weaker elements of the traditional view. To a vicious extent it rejects testimony in favor of conjecture. It pours deserved contempt on the excessive use of processes of harmonization in the traditional treatments, but in its own treatments makes a far more excessive use of baseless harmonizing processes. It treats living tissues as if

they were dead matter, to a great extent ignoring all elements that are not purely mechanical in the speech and conduct of the writers of the Old Testament and the persons mentioned therein. I have no doubt the final higher criticism of the Old Testament will assign extreme antiquity to the little poems quoted in Genesis; or that it will regard the contents of the Hexateuch as so far belonging to the times of Moses and Joshua as to justify the ancient tradition attributing its authorship to these two men, provided that tradition be correctly understood; or that it will regard David and his contemporaries as the great psalm writers of Israel. I say these things here, not for the purpose of obtruding my opinions, but to make definite the point of view from which the things that follow in this article are said. There are plenty of scholarly men who place a much higher estimate than I do upon the work done and the results reached by the prevailing schools of higher criticism; but I think that no one will dispute the proposition that our present higher criticism is far from final.

In the second place, our prevalent type of higher criticism is not a merely shallow, transitory, impertinent, flippant playing with a great subject. Engaged in it are men of all types of intellectual and religious character. It is likely enough that some of them may have had unworthy motives. In what movement are men uniformly free from unworthy motives? But this field compares well with other fields of investigation in the amount and quality of reverent study, of painstaking industry, that have been expended in it by men of ability and insight and devotion to the truth. Many of the results reached are permanent and valuable. If the clergymen who are most uncompromisingly opposed to the prevalent type of higher criticism will take the trouble to compare the helps to Bible study they now use, and the Bible articles they themselves now write, with those which they used or wrote twenty years ago, most of them will appreciate the fact that they have learned much in twenty years, and that they have learned it largely from their opponents. The higher criticism of the future will accept the doctrine that the Hexateuch is a unit. It will accept a large part of the current

classification of the literary phenomena of the six books, though I think it will account for them by better hypotheses than those now in vogue, and will certainly reject most of the dates now proposed. Other permanent fruits have been gathered. The man who sees clearest the weaknesses and the vices of the higher criticism now in vogue ought also to be most appreciative of its excellences.

In the third place the prevalent higher criticism is not necessarily an attack upon the truthfulness of the Old Testament or upon its claim to our reverence as the Word of God. In this statement the word "necessarily" is important. In a great transition movement there are all sorts of side currents, and some of them differ in direction from the main current. Incidentally, in particular instances, there can be no doubt that faith in the Bible has been sapped. Individual critics have actually been hostile to the received doctrines, and their hostility has not unfrequently been aggravated by the treatment they have received. There have been needless antagonisms, and there have been reckless statements on both sides. And besides this the current criticism, if accepted, logically necessitates modifications of the views of inspiration that have heretofore prevailed. And there are minds so constituted that they will drop their belief in inspiration rather than modify it. Every transition of opinion and every proposed transition, while it is being considered, is attended with peril to individuals. All this is a reason for watchfulness and care. It is not surprising if it causes alarm to good men. The advocates of new views should be very considerate of those who are alarmed. Nevertheless, little children should learn to walk, even if creeping is for the time safer than walking. The fact that the search for knowledge involves danger is no reason why we should be content to remain ignorant.

As a matter of individual opinion I am sure that the final higher criticism will not accept the views which most strongly demand great changes from the received doctrines of inspiration. But even with the utmost modifications called for by the criticism now current, one might still consistently hold that the Bible is in a singular sense God's Word, the record of a unique

revelation inspired by the divine Spirit, the ultimate rule of doctrine and conduct.

One more point, a fourth, must suffice. The prevalent higher criticism is not merely the erratic movement of a few men, to be dealt with as an erratic movement, by ostracism, or satire, or hurried denunciation. A favorite way some have of attacking it is by alleging that its positions are those of Paine's *Age of Reason*. Very likely some of them are. Paine had access in Paris to the works of the great pioneers of the present higher critical movement, and presumably he used them. The alleged resemblances between the *Age of Reason* and the current critical theories are mostly unreal, but it is a fact that these pioneer critics have now obtained from the devout Christian world the hearing that was denied them a hundred years ago. Whether the fact is pleasing or not, it is a fact. The higher criticism of today is part of a long-existing historical movement. Its progress in the past can be traced. Its laws can be ascertained. It is bound to go forward to its proper terminus. It is not accidental that the coming to the front of these discussions occurs in our day. A hundred years ago was too early for it; a hundred years hence would have been too late. It comes under law. In other words it is providential. The world has just become ripe for it. It is a part of God's plan for the education of mankind.

The time has come for a better knowledge of the Bible than was formerly possible. The conflict that is going on will be a benefit to us, if it awakens us to this fact. Without the conflict we should not have become conscious of our need. The conflict provokes study and discussion. It would not provoke these half so thoroughly were there no disclosures of error or of danger. Every time of unsettlement has its peril, but by such crises a more intelligent knowledge and a firmer faith become possible. It is ours to watch, to keep our eyes open to the signs of the times, to recognize the good there is, and to resist the evil, to do this without becoming uncharitable or unjust toward those who differ with us, and without becoming panic stricken, as though God could be slain, or truth could fail.